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A Quarterly of New Literature

ACCENT

WILLIAM VAN O'CONNOR and W. R. MOSES:
Essays on Faulkner's 'The Bear'

REX WORTHINGTON:
A Kind of Scandal

CID CORMAN:
Dylan Thomas

WILLIAM JAY SMITH: Translations from Laforgue

MILLEN BRAND: An Old Man Toward the End

HOWARD GRIFFIN: A Dialogue with Auden (on Dante)

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STANFORD WHITMORE
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ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

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REX WORTHINGTON:

A Kind of Scandal

Well me and Dumdie was playing catch in the alley with an old softball my brother Fred gave me once and when the stuffings came out we got tired and sat down under Henniger's big tree and pretty soon Dumdie thought it would be a good idea to steal some of Mr. Vanderplagg's apples. We didn't really steal them cause they're always green and got worms in them all the time and Mr. Vanderplagg don't want them anyway. Dumdie just liked to say that word so we went and stole a whole bunch and threw them at telephone poles and Dumdie beat me almost every time cause he was older than I was and then he made me stand way back so I couldn't even throw far enough to hit the telephone pole except once when it bounced and Dumdie said I was a sissy and I got mad and went in the house. I told my mother and she said, "That's what you get, I guess you'll never learn," so I went to the toilet and came back in the kitchen and washed my hands and showed my mother before I made a piece of bread with brown sugar on it and when I was eating Dumdie came in our back yard and looked through the screen door. When I got through I went and told my mother and she said, "Well?" and looked at me at the same time

so I went in the kitchen and got a glass of water and threw it through the screen door on Dumdie but that made my mother mad and she made me go out and play with Dumdie. Dumdie said we ought to steal some more of Mr. Vanderplagg's apples and I said "No," till Dumdie said he could get one of Mr. Turpin's golf clubs and we could play golf with the apples and I said he couldn't so we went down in Mr. Vanderplagg's back yard. Mr. Vanderplagg's back yard is all sunk and cooler than other back yards cause my father said Barbee Creek ran through there before I was born but it's under the ground now and Mr. Turpin lived in Mr. Vanderplagg's red house around in the back where we was. That's not where Mr. Vanderplagg lives though. He lives in his own house on the corner but they got the same back yard only he don't rent that one except downstairs and my mother said we'd never live in a place like that even if Mr. Vanderplagg is rich like all the Belgians cause they got lizards I mean snails all the time and sometimes they wake up in the morning with mold on their shoes. Dumdie could pick up snails like fishworms but they make me want to throw up so we hunted awhile but you can't find them in the daytime except that snotty stuff they make all over the place and Dumdie started digging in some crumbly bricks and found one and I said I don't want to play with any slimy, dirty rotten, filthy lousy lizards I mean snails only I said lizards that time and I said I was going to go home. So Dumdie squashed it and we went over to Mr. Turpin's door and Dumdie was going to go in but the door was hooked so we looked through the wire and it was pretty dark in there for daytime but we could see Mr. Turpin in bed and that woman he said was his maid was in there with him and Dumdie said how about letting us use one of his golf clubs to knock apples with and Mr. Turpin said we was too little and go away and I said to Mr. Turpin my big brother said you can't afford a maid. They looked quiet for a minute and then Mr. Turpin laughed and she said, "Oh, for goodness sake, let them have one," only she didn't say it just like that and Mr. Turpin said he'd give us his old putter so he got out of bed and got it for us. After we said, "Thank you," we stole some more of Mr. Vanderplagg's apples and went up where he's going to build a garage for his apartment people but all he's got done is the foundation and that makes the ground there even higher than the alley and Dumdie said that'd be a good place to knock apples so we knocked them across the alley against Mr. Peterson's garage till Dumdie hit one clean over the garage and he said, "I bet you can't do that," and I said, "I can too," and I don't

know, I almost forget, but while I was taking a big swing Dumdie bent down to pick up an apple and before I knew it I hit him in the place you call the temple and he held his head with both hands and said, "Oh, Jim," in a kind of old tired voice like if my mother'd said it and he ran down the steps in Mr. Vanderplagg's back yard and I thought first he was going to tell Mr. Turpin but he went up the steps on the other side and headed for home and I got scared and ran home too. Then when I saw my mother —

"All right, Jim. That's all we wanted to know. That's fine," the big man in the striped suit said. He turned to the lady with fat legs and said, "All right," and she shut her notebook and went out. Then he turned to Jim and said, "And that's just the way it happened, wasn't it, Jim. You don't remember any more?"

"No sir."

"All right. That's fine," he said. He got up and shook hands with Jim's father and grinned with big cheeks at Jim's mother. "Mr. and Mrs. Ryan — you folks have been most helpful."

"Well, we wanted to do everything right," Bill Ryan said.

"That's right. That's fine." Julia Ryan reached down to take Jim's hand and they were going. In the other room the lady had her legs under a little table, and she was running her typewriter and looking at her notebook. She smiled at Jim who looked at the floor. Then they went down the hall and got in the elevator. Julia leaned back in the corner and grinned because elevators made her feel funny.

Bill Ryan cleared his throat and said, "Why didn't you say, 'Luther'?"

"Cause Dumdie didn't like that name."

When they got outside, Julia said, "Thank goodness that's over."

* * * *

It began one Saturday afternoon when Jim came running down the alley and couldn't get the back gate open. Julia, who was weeding the garden, looked up and said, "What's the matter? You have to go to the bathroom again?" For answer Jim began to scream and dance up and down jerkily, like a puppet. "What in the world?" Julia said and went over and unlocked the gate. He squirmed past her and went running up the path. But instead of going in the house he dived under the back porch. When Julia peered into the shadows under the porch, Jim looked like a frightened cat, and she said, "What's

the matter?" Jim began screaming again. "Oh, dear," she said and got down and crawled part way under the porch. "Now what is it? Tell me."

"I hit Dumdie in the head," he bellowed.

"Oh, my. How? Did you hurt him?"

"We was playing golf. And the blood squirted out like anything."

"Oh, merciful God," she whimpered. "Where? Where'd you do it?"

"Vanderplagg's," he got out. Julia backed out from under the porch and struck her head so hard her glasses fell down from one ear. "I didn't do it on purpose," Jim screamed.

"Oh, shut up and stay there," she said, half mad with pain; and she ran down the path and out into the alley. She found the blood sprinkled on the green apples; it led like a string of beads down the steps into Vanderplagg's yard and up the opposite stairs to the sidewalk. When Julia reached the sidewalk, she hiked up her skirts and came swinging up the street revealing her torn petticoat and the tops of her cotton stockings to all the neighbors. There were already several of them out in their yards, bristling in the quickening air like dogs who have smelled something and don't yet know what it is.

What is it?

Why, I saw him.

It's the Hiller boy.

Myra Hiller met Julia at the door, standing so handsome and self-possessed there in her beautiful house coat that Julia stopped and smoothed her hands down over her skirt. But then seeing the flush on Myra's cheeks and a strand of lavender hair askew, she cried, "Oh, Myra. Merciful God."

"There, there," Myra said. "I don't think he's hurt too bad." Dumdie was in his parents' bedroom, and Myra's daughter Doreathy was holding a wet towel to his head.

"Well, you're all right, aren't you Dumdie," Julia said. Dumdie smiled thinly.

"I think he's all right," Myra said. "I've seen him come home worse than this."

Julia took this up and thought that there was a lot of truth in it because everybody knew that Dumdie was a little odd, and he must be something like that drunk, Hootie Randall, who was always falling down and never got hurt and came home one time with his face looking like he'd had a run-in with a pack of wildcats. That made her feel better.

"Aren't you going to get the doctor?" Doreathy said.

"Oh, now hush, smarty. I've already called for an A-M-B-U-L-A-N-C-E," Myra said.

Julia couldn't take her eyes off Doreathy, who was sitting on the bed in only her slip. With her round little figure revealed, her pert face and reddish hair, she looked just like Clara Bow. Then out of the blue, Julia remembered that Hootie Randall had shot himself. "You going to take him to the H-O-S-P-I-T-O-L?" she said to Myra who nodded. Julia glanced back at Dumdie who had closed his eyes and was as white as the pillow he was lying on. "I'll get Bill up," she burst out, causing Dumdie to open his eyes.

"Oh, let the poor man sleep," Myra protested. "I haven't even called Frank home yet."

"Oh, now never mind," Julia cried peevishly, running out the front door, "I know what I'm doing." Bill worked nights and had to have his rest in the daytime, but why was he always asleep when something happened, and as Julia struggled up the back-yard path, she cried, "Bill, Bill," with all the breath that was left in her.

Bill, when he woke, couldn't seem to get it straight, and he kept asking who Dumdie was. When he learned that Jim was under the back porch, he went out and asked him where in the world he'd got hold of a golf club. But Jim began to cry and Bill couldn't make heads or tails of what he was saying. "Merciful God, c'mon," Julia said, grabbing his arm and pulling him down the path toward the garage. They drove straight to the hospital and stayed there till late that night, when Dumdie died.

* * * *

"Well, everything's under control here," Gladys Houston called out the back door when Bill and Julia were no more than halfway up the path from the garage. When Julia came up on the porch, Gladys saw the look on her face and knew what she was going to say, and, as if she had to have her say first, she began, "The girls are both in bed and Jim's been in bed hours ago. What a fine healthy appetite those children have — I've often told Harry I wish I could have had some children of my own just to watch them eat. As soon as you called from the hospital I sent Harry to the store for some ice cream, and those kids tore into that like they'd never seen it before."

"Why, Gladys, there were a lot of leftovers in the refrigerator."

"Oh, now, Julia, you don't mind, I'm sure. I love your wonderful children and I thought a special treat would keep their minds off what

happened." Gladys, seeing that this brought Julia back to Dumdie and that she was going to speak, went on quickly, "What a fine handsome understanding young man you have in Fred. Why, when he came home, it was like having a man in the house and he kept the girls in line and went out and got Jim out from under the back porch — the poor little fellow was sound asleep — and Fred cleaned him up and put him into bed. After I got the girls to bed I sent Fred to the movies and while he was gone I just thought I'd tidy up the kitchen a bit." And she stepped back from the door for the first time to let Julia and Bill in their own house. Gladys settled herself by the kitchen cabinet and waited; Julia got it out at last, "Dumdie died." It sounded like the beginning of a nursery rhyme, Gladys thought, and she said, "Oh, Julia, you have a lot to be thankful for. It could just as easily been your boy as not. Mrs. Jordan and Mrs. Kuntz came over tonight and they saw Jim and that Hiller boy out there this afternoon when they were coming home from their shopping and they said they said then, 'Somebody's liable to get hurt.'"

Julia, turning uncertainly in the middle of her polished kitchen, stopped and fixed her eyes on Gladys. "You mean it's all over town already?"

"Well, now, Julia," Gladys said, "you mustn't think I did it. They came over here after I got the girls to bed, and you can ask Fred, he was right there with me."

"Julia didn't mean anything," Bill put in.

Julia, thinking of the blood on Vanderplagg's steps and splattered along the sidewalk in the bright afternoon sun right up to the Hiller place, cried out, "Oh, how could they help but know! I haven't seen so much blood since that motorcycle policeman got hit on the corner."

Gladys looked upset, as if this was in bad taste; and Bill, who had seen Dumdie only in the hospital with a neat bandage around his head, replied, "Oh, Julia, don't dwell on it so. There wasn't much blood."

"Don't tell me what I didn't see," Julia said, turning on her husband. "If I could sleep on a picket fence like you can, I wouldn't see anything either."

"Now, Julia," Bill protested gently, while Gladys said, "Well, I'd better get back home. I've got a man of my own to take care of."

Julia watched her go but then ran to the door and said, "Gladys, I didn't mean anything, really. Don't be angry. But you know how people are."

Gladys turned, a light like triumph on her face, and whispered through the screen door, "Now, honey, I understand, and I don't think there's going to be much talk. It's like Mrs. Kuntz said, everybody knows that Hiller boy wasn't just right and maybe it was an act of God that it was him instead of your boy."

Julia took that to bed with her, and the next morning being Sunday, she insisted that the whole family go to church. But how could it have got round so fast, she wondered, when, getting there late because Jim had had to go to the bathroom at the last minute, the entire congregation turned to watch the Ryans file in. The only bench open was one down near the front on the side. Walking down the aisle Julia thought she was going to faint because Bill didn't seem to know how to act not having been to church, as everybody probably knew, since he got married over twenty years ago, and kept talking to the children in his street voice just as if nothing was wrong.

The Ryans took up the entire bench by themselves; and when the collection plate came round, Julia discovered that she hadn't any change and Bill had forgot his wallet. The plate was handed to Julia at one end of the row and given by Bill to a monitor at the other end without as much as a red cent being dropped in. By the time Julia got home she was so upset she could hardly get dinner; she crabbed at the girls who began to cry and pick on Jim, telling him that it was all his fault anyway. That set Jim off, causing Bill to descend on his children; and Fred, being sixteen, said, "You people act like you don't have any sense."

Later in the day the newspaper sent a man over, who asked if he could have a picture of Jim. Julia regretted afterward being so rude, but at the time she was hot and tired and nobody but her seemed to realize how awful this thing was, so that she practically drove him down the steps. The next day there it was in a sub-head right under something about scandals in Washington; and all up and down the street Julia could see the neighbors coming out on their porches after the paper boy had passed, as if he were scattering gold. "Oh, I tell you I'm going to go out of my mind if this doesn't stop," she shouted.

Bill did, in fact, tell her that she wasn't acting at all sensible when she said that Jim would have to go to the funeral. "I don't give a damn what anybody thinks," he said. "It's too much to ask of a little boy."

Julia seemed to have been waiting for this; she breathed a long sigh and said meekly, "You don't think it would be the thing to do then?"

"Damn it, no," he said, feeling his strength, "it's enough that you and me go."

As Julia often told Gladys, "Bill always has to know which way the wind's blowing and who killed Cock Robin, but once he gets everything straight, there's nobody like him." She clung tightly to her husband's arm there in the funeral parlor, when he took her straight up the aisle to view the body past all those eyes like rows of marbles; and she was able to shed a few quiet tears which made her feel as if she had taken a weight off her shoulders and left it on Dumdie's casket. Afterward Myra, looking as smart all in black as an actress, asked Julia and Bill to ride to the cemetery with the Hillers. Then later she had them drop by for cake and coffee and asked several times how Jimmy was taking it all. Julia accepted this with a twinge of guilt, and when she got home, she fell on Jim with so many soft words and caresses that at last he became cross and ended up by crying.

That evening Julia and Gladys talked across the back yard fence: "They say he's going to marry her," Gladys said.

"Do you suppose this business had anything to do with it?" Julia asked.

"Wouldn't be surprised."

"No wedding ring's going to make a lady out of that woman," Julia said. They were looking across the Houstons' back yard down into Vanderplagg's; Mr. Turpin was moving, and that woman was helping him. Looking neither to the right nor the left they hurried back and forth from Turpin's rooms to his car, resembling ants each time they disappeared into the apartment only to emerge with a fresh burden. "They see us all right," Julia said.

Across the alley Mrs. Peterson had stuck her head out of an upstairs window to watch, and Mr. Peterson and Mr. Henniger, who were in the alley smoking, were watching too.

"I'll bet they feel nice," Gladys said acidly.

Mr. Turpin came out of the apartment with his bag of golf clubs covered over with a dark cloth and moved up the steps to his car.

"There," Julia breathed.

"May God forgive them," Gladys said.

While Turpin went over to Mr. Vanderplagg's house on the corner, his woman got in the car and waited; he came back shortly, got in the car, and they drove away.

"Well, good riddance of bad rubbish," Gladys said.

"I don't know," Julia said, "maybe they were instruments of God, as they say."

"He ain't so good as he was.
 Ain't doin' good.
 I pity him." (softly)
 Mabel goes
 to him and away
 down the stairs,
 and so, for long hours,
 he lies alone.

Once on a train
 when fatigue remade the world
 (a little uremic poisoning),
 he pointed out in one seat
 Favario, the sculptor of the angels;
 and in another, his cousin, Eddie Leacraft;
 and in another, that one —
 "the florist, what was his name?"
 George smiles from the dresser
 his invisible smile.
 "I'm always fighting my father
 in my dreams."

Dreams
 come with the dark.
 The dark descends
 over the rear building, slowly,
 down over the steep-pitched roof
 and the two gable windows drawn on a line
 like a ledge, in a saffron struggle,
 the light creaming
 to a roar as it gives out.
 Then the dangerous time begins:
 the unwilling guard at the cellar door
 lets through
 the upward-riding shadows.
 These shadows are desire,
 desire of years,
 desire of hard body,
 desire of love.
 He wants a mist of perfect light
 around its contour, vapor
 on its sides.

Sensuous angels
 reach for his bed.
 They are not definite,
 they are edged with blue outlines
 like the sky,
 like water.
 And they have voices.

Between waking and sleep,
 between waking and dream,
 between desire and fear,
 with the force of a walking bear
 he gets up from bed.
 He clings to the railing of the stairs
 going down.

The brain's portals
 open, their arachnoid knots
 flashing
 under the dura
 their warning
 of the drowned.

They find him on a chair in the kitchen,
 unable to say
 how he got there.

Old, old,
 he asks no pity.
 His eyebrows shadow
 his eyes. He knows
 where he is
 in his woken
 sockets.

3

From the bed,
 he sees the street
 and does not see it, resting.
 Perhaps the pillows' comfort arranges it
 into hypnoid landscapes,
 into railroad stations.
 He can close his eyes today
 to the steam roller

and to those heavy half shoes
 coated with the spring's black asphalt as with mud
 the workmen wear,
 and journey
 in his eyelids'
 mirror.

4

He tells it gently:

"I had my hand under the cover —
 like this — and he — or she — grasped it —
 like this. I didn't make any remonstrance.
 I waited for him — or her — to discover that I had discovered —
 him."

To exist with the unsuspecting suspected,
 the unfronted confronted.

The cover lay solid as a mountain
 over his arm. Between his arm and the wall
 there was no space, but in that spacelessness
 fear took his pulse.

He accustoms himself to it the way
 a bird in the woods complains
 at sunset.

He accustoms himself to it the way
 a half-asleep child winks
 the sound of the truck's airbrake
 into dream.

5

He raises his hand
 to get the light behind it, its fire
 taking fire from the sun,
 penumbral flame
 softer than blood.

The loneliness is all
 in waiting, the heart
 letting its bell
 like a tongue
 fall.

6

It is the smoke
leaking out of "your picture" that does it,
beginning perhaps at the row of medals
and the blue breast leaning
away from the kamikaze rockets and the momentary
boiling of the sea. The smoke
moves up over the black border
of the mirror in which the night light
makes its milk saucer, it blots the saucer,
and continues to the ceiling.
It is when it creeps toward him
from the blue-vested heart
that he screams. Lost.

7

He failed to get a bed that cranked,
he notices.
When the morning nurse lets the light
into the ward,
he finds himself racked up
in a crib,
his mind clear
and the seas gone that scratched
their sharp saw
on the sky.
Calm has come with light.
His faint heels with their live calluses
hit the footrail.

In the next bed
a man sits, patient:
down over his nose
a glass tube draws a silver line
like an interplanetary
apparatus. He stares at it
in a mirror.
On the other side a man
sleeps.

"Where's my watch?"
 "We don't have your watch, Dad."
 He left it home, then.
 No money, either.
 And from his neck the nightgown bib,
 like a king's coarse linen,
 falls away over his chest
 and slips up above his knees.
 His friends, the two men,
 rise into his eyes.
 They are real,
 the nurse's arm
 is real.
 It is a mistake
 inflicted by the night
 in its lonely, long bazaar.
 "Let me go home."

JULES LAFORGUE:

Asides from the Clowns

XII-XVI

Translated by William Jay Smith

Another book; ah, that I were
 Far away from How-do-you-do's,
 Filthy people, francs and sous,
 Far from our phraseologies.

Another one of my clowns is dead;
 Of chronic orphanhood, he died;

A lunar dandy's heart inside
Such a ludicrous little body.

Nothing but pigs, gods don't endure,
And every day it is getting worse;
I've done my time, I'm packing off
For an All-Inclusive Sinecure.

* *

I did, indeed, I made her grieve
For one whole year, the whole year through,
And what, was she surprised at that?

Perfect, draped in our layettes,
On those Hymettus honeymoons,
We overdid the comic hat.

My window weeps, farewell! We yawn
Toward the leaden-colored skies
Where the Moon has her funeral.

I will not accuse a single soul
Although I was betrayed by all.
But oh, could I relax up there!

* *

My hands in my pockets
I wander along,
 And hear the song
 Of a thousand bells
All saying Time is running short,
 Shorter than you think.

God is not my affair,
My place is here.
 The cottage roof
 Above my head
Is my Universe. I walk straight,
 And I intend no harm.

History I know,
 And Nature, too,
 Those markets full
 Of used goods;
 So I can vouch for what I say
 As the gospel truth.

* *

I hear my Sacred-Heart beat,
 Lonely and companionless,
 In the twilight of the hour
 With little hope, and no retreat.

I hear my youthful blood course
 Ambiguous through my arteries
 Between the Edens of my verse
 And the province of my fathers.

I hear also the flute of Pan.
 "Go far, go far afield!" it sings.
 "Die, when life demands too much;
 But, mark you, he who loses wins."

* *

A lunar reveler am I,
 Making ripples in a pool;
 The only end I have in view
 To be the subject of a myth.

Defiantly I roll my sleeves,
 The sleeves of a pale mandarin;
 I round my lips, and then — exhale
 Sweet counsel of the crucifix.

Yes, be the subject of a myth
 On the verge of charlatan centuries!
 But where are the Moons of Yesteryear?
 And when is God to be renewed?

HOWARD GRIFFIN:

Conversation on Cornelia Street, V

A Dialogue with W. H. Auden

I: It is curious that as Dante goes further in Hell he feels less pity.

Auden: Yes, he takes compassion on Paolo and Francesca; but none on the falsifiers. Then he gets down to those who betrayed their benefactors, who seemed to do evil gratuitously; they exist under a cover of ice —

I: That is, the feelings of others cannot pierce to them —

A: They are isolated by what they are. Like Dostoyevsky, Dante exploits the figures of Satan and Iscariot to remind us of the reality of evil. He'd have had only scorn for the mechanistic theory that's tried to turn society into a mass of pleasure-seeking units. The modern view is: we live in a world of imperfect materiality. The perfection of technical methods helps us to progress. Almost no one believes in a *force of evil*; no one now can conceive conditions so bad economic measures cannot cope with them. The technician (the modern man) looks on natural catastrophes and moral disorders as flaws in the overall machinery of living. Individuals (to him) are objects to handle, things responsive to manipulative techniques. But Dante explained evil *rationally*.

I: During his youth Dante must have felt he was worthy of Hell, he confesses to the sins of *lussuria* and pride.

A: He believed he escaped punishment by "grappling down the hair of Satan," thus coming clear on the other side. But we must not talk loosely of pity; it's a precise emotion. Because of early emotional experiences Dante can feel with Paolo and Latini; he cannot with Alberigo or Bocca degli Abati.

I: We don't know much of Dante's youth.

A: No. But he was a passionate man. Had he not been he couldn't have written the Fifth Canto. Whom does he place among those winds? — *those who subject reason to lust*. Do you remember the lines "And as their wings bear along the starlings at the cold season in large and crowded troops"? We talk, justly, of coldblooded sex, for habitual sex finally deadens the power of feeling. In this circle Dante

places Dido, Cleopatra, Semiramis, Paris and Tristan, "those whom love had parted from our life."

I: — those who loved "fit to die" —

A: There's hope for a man as long as he is joined to all the living. When this connection breaks up, he's doomed. Because of the sin of *lussuria*, the black storm buffets these figures and no punishment could be more subtle, self-determined and truthful.

You mentioned before that Dante confessed to the sin of *lussuria*. He must have felt (how else can we account for his sympathy with Paolo?) that under different circumstances his love for Beatrice and the lady of the window might have become a self-yielding. In sacred and profane love he recognizes an impulse that sends the spirit in one case eventually toward God, in the other toward the sexual object. This force he likens to a wind that may be savage or smooth: he describes Paolo and Francesca as being borne "*so light* upon the wind," and across the distance that separates them Dante cries: "Come speak to us, if none denies it." Then the power of the breath desiring communication works with an initiative of its own, and Dante's cry arouses in the couple their will which takes the form of a different wind driving them in the direction of knowledge and understanding. By one impulse they soar from the center of the condemned band and rise toward the place where the poets await them.

I: It is a wonderful stroke that Dante causes the storm to cease during their dialogue.

A: The desire to communicate destroys sensuality. That long speech beginning "O living creature" occurs without being given to either Paolo or Francesca, but as if issuing from both their mouths. They say, "Of that which it pleases thee to hear and speak, we will hear and speak with you." In other words, this is no rhetorical thing. Whereas a lesser poet would have made of their words a statement, Dante creates the effect of a spiritual influence. We see that Hell has instructed them. In this passage between the quick and the dead, there is speaking, there is listening. Afterward Dante bows his face and remains silent a long while. When he speaks it is with directness and self-involvement. After he has heard Francesca's story, he loses consciousness and falls "as a dead body falls." His identification and pity force him to know their death. Sexual love becomes the destruction of *self* and its recalled image blanks out the world.

I: The storm-metaphor for this has been used by others, more romantically by the Marquis de Sade, for instance. A bolt of lightning

kills Justine. Do you think that the element of violence exceeds pleasure or fulfillment in sex?

A: To know others through sex means to know them in a divisive way. We associate sex largely with youth because to the young the world has an aspect of hostility. The sexual experience is not only divisive but consolatory. Because of the melancholy that attacks young people, sex (the overwhelming discovery of it in its strength) comes to them as a reward without which there'd be nothing for them to do but commit suicide. The young lover resembles a figure in a Roualt, a thick black line separates him not only from his environment and family but even from his partner.

I: When children reach adolescence parents sense the break in communication and say, What's the matter?, etc. But one cannot speak out, for about the sex-experience one can't be articulate. Even if one could, the others wouldn't recognize that description as anything they'd known because sex-experience can't be rightly remembered; what we recall remains a romanticization.

A: Quite. If you'll have the patience, I'd like to read you something from the *Tristan* libretto. The lovers have met by night in the garden; this is what they say:

Art thou mine?
Do I behold thee?
Do I embrace thee?
Can I believe it?
At last! At last!
Here on my breast!
Do I then clasp thee!
Is it thy own self?
Are these thine eyes?
These thy lips?

— etcetera, for thirty lines in the same vein. You'll call this drivel but it is also, I think, amazingly accurate. At this point, the writer frankly rejects intellectual symbols and turns to rhythm and a tomtomlike repetition to express the sexual. That many lovers are moved to try to write or speak poetry is not a good thing — it would be better for them to make love. One feels this, too, in connection with *Tristan* and *Isolde*, knowing, however, the limitations of the opera stage. In view of this, the resource to such compulsive speech provides the next best thing. When one feels, one talks beside the mark.

I: Sex can never be understood *from the outside*, can it?

A: No. For this reason, *any* description of the sexual act must be pornographic. Becoming conscious of it essentially changes the experience and that precludes any discussion of it. To a child it will seem comic or uninteresting; the adult knows the spirit is involved.

I: Along the beach at Naples at twilight I once came on a couple having intercourse. Close by, a child was playing, collecting shells, molding shapes in the sand without concern for what the others were doing . . . and the lovers remained unconcerned with the child.

A: Yes, the nature of erotic love causes forgetfulness of the child (the figure of charity). Then, other human beings within the periphery of the lovers become accidental, unrelated to the world of feeling in which the lovers are commanded to exist. But the others cannot be called "intruders"; there's no reason why they should or shouldn't be there.

I: How sharply that world of feeling separates the lover from the world.

A: The old stories symbolized this by an external act, perhaps by the swallowing of a love-draught. In the Tristan legend the potion acts as an excuse for loving when your duty demands that you don't. (Of course, it motivates King Mark's forgiveness, too; he's more concerned with the defection of his knight than with the queen's disloyalty.) The juice of the purple flower in *Midsummer Night's Dream* intimates that love, after all, may be chemical or accidental. In many fairytales the cockadoodle-broth preceding love indicates that the condition of being in love is a toxic state. Though we believe our love to be caused by the innate value of an object, we must beware for the sake of the object which may need quite different things; we must beware for our own sake. Notice, too, that the potion is something you always get for another, not for yourself.

I: Not till Dante has gone through the circles of Purgatory does he arrive at the Garden of Eden.

A: And beyond that he comes to the City of God. In the eyes of the Church the City of God lay at the end of stages of Self-Change; that is, you began with the human world, with the history of damnation, and advanced (if you advanced at all) to the lost state of innocence represented by the Garden in Christian myth (by the golden age in Hesiod), and from that went on to the state of infallibility where temptation itself was impossible. What Dante describes in *The Inferno* and *The Purgatorio* is *The World*. Here visual setting becomes

the symbol of reality. He endows states of mind with the urgency of places. Despair, for instance, becomes a burning plain; repentance, a green lawn.

Dante, incidentally, didn't think of erotic love as a state to be desired. In his case it was lucky Beatrice married someone else and died young.

I: But the sympathy he feels for Paolo and Francesca, and for Latini, amounts almost to an identification.

A: Yes.

I: Latini's punishment is often cited as an example of Dante's "fairness." It seems rather an example of his short-sightedness.

A: Without question Dante accepted church-doctrine on this point. Though he admired and loved the man, he has to put him in Hell. Dante firmly believed that men like Latini, Tagghiaio and Rusticucci had turned from the Face of God, were proud, self-loving, resentful. It's quite possible that Heaven will be full of people you don't like.

I: And Hell crowded with wits and athletes.

A: Hell maintains itself, Dante says, according to Divine Power and Primal Love. The souls know why they're in Hell and can be no other place. Recognizing the need to work out their fates through unhappiness, they run toward, they embrace their punishments. If there were no demons, no Minos, no walls, still the damned souls would not leave, being the prisoners of themselves. The penalties, the obstructions, are what they have done. You recall the words of Forese, catching himself, impulsively correcting his thought: "Not once only while circling this road is our pain renewed — I say pain and ought to say solace," i.e., it is pain, is felt strictly as such. After a labyrinth of false moves and losses, you come at last to the place that you know is the place for you, unfortunately (the place where you must learn to suffer); this has no kinship to masochism.

I: But even if one realizes the Damned are not being tortured against their wills and Dante cannot sympathize with them (for that would imply being in the same category), it seems that he sometimes goes too far. His treatment of Bocca, for instance, — falling on his head in the ice and tearing tufts of hair from it.

A: Oh, Dante mightn't have been easy to get along with. Were it not for these faults his acts in the Purgatorio and Paradiso would lack meaning. What Dante gives us in *The Comedy* is a working-history of his mind and heart, not an autobiography.

I: It seems very important that Dante was, in the worldly sense, unsuccessful.

An Old Song

When I was young I knew that I would die,
The fear of an old death went out with me.
The rank green wasted; fiddle, so did I,
But I was long-lived as the hemlock tree.

Yes, I was strong as juniper. The pitch,
The amber resin, all of those strong tars,
The pungent aromatics of the bitch,
I kept in fascinating rows of jars.

All those other odors. Love's a smell.
I'll dance the diddy on a wrinkled knee;
The empty udders dangle on the shell.
Now the fat's gone, some gnaw the bone with me.

I tell you death's hard fought for, hard to kill.
On powdered mirrors these death's eyes outstare
The old bold adversary of the will.
I am the death, and who comes for his share?

The Snake Charmer (after Rousseau)

This land of artifice, subtle and bold:
I hear the peacock scream, the puma pads
Among the lace ferns, a roseate spoonbill
Stiff as spun glass steps at the water's edge.
I had not understood the snake, still cold,
How in a tapestry his blackness burns.
She charms as to his sting she is more charmed
And venom to flesh, her flute sings to his coils.

The girls on Sunday pause in a light trill
Before the canvases, doubting their knowledge,
From the innocent drudgery of their toils,
Stare at his strike of evil and are scarcely harmed.

CID CORMAN:

Dylan Thomas: Rhetorician in Mid-Career

DYLAN THOMAS: *Collected Poems, 1934-1953*. New Directions.

That Thomas is a very limited poet, despite his birth-(love)-death ambit, is almost a constant self-testimony in his work and particularly in this new book. There is a note of self-pity that is more or less implicit in his previous books and comes to the top more explicitly in poems like "Lament" and "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night." He is aware of it, and plays it through a lusty or gentle humor or by carrying his mourning into compassion. The desire for innocence is great. His struggle for "life" becomes more desperately rhetorical. But particulars are needed.

Most of Thomas's poems are noticeably local in coloring, of the Welsh locale — of course, as by birthright, Camarthenshire. (His stories, which deserve special consideration, more outrightly so.) He starts from a haunt where music and reverence are companionable and ripe. No one has not noticed his powerful rhetoric, his Biblical breath, and his Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. Lustiness and tenderness confer in his poems. "When I was a windy boy and a bit / And the black spit of the chapel fold, / (Sighed for the old ram rod, dying of women), / I tiptoed shy in the gooseberry wood, / . . . / And on seesaw-sunday nights I wooed / Whoever I would with my wicked eyes . . ." Compassion, yes, is the center of his soul's most conscious development and the point on which his pivot spins. The isolation of the dying body prints lament on the earlier boyish arrogance, which Thomas in interview once remarked a backward envy for. His loneliness is fat with the need of an overbearing love. The dilemma of life as a self bound in body finds its god riding pity. Any man's art is his answer.

I fix this discussion upon what seems to me a crucial poem in Thomas's career, his "Over Sir John's Hill." Here the poet is close to home. He is seen at his compassionate most; he grieves, as so many of his verses do, for a world pledged to war, for the weak, the innocent, the many. His hero is inevitably the child, the player and playmate, the boy on the tumbling hill, the girl in the bushes, the sparrows, the bird-breasted, the hunchbacked and aged. The poet is eulogizer of the hot-and-cold inevitable ends. The verses hover and hymn, dramatize with a lyrical break, in much the same way as a choral passage in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus about the outbreak of the Trojan War. They are wide with dignity and a sweet care for the language of metaphor, whether in the soft music of "I open the leaves of the water at a passage / Of psalms and shadows among the pincered sandcrabs prancing" or the judging incantation and prayer (ah, the paradoxical twinge) of ". . . the led-astray birds whom God, for their breast of whistles, / Have mercy on, / God in his whirlwind silence save, who marks the sparrows hail, / For their souls' song."

But the poet, in his prayer, is not concerned with either expiation or pity (though he may unintentionally draw on both); he is concerned here with the quality of mercy. And the quality of the poem, and of Thomas basically too,

is the quality of his mercy. There is the event of the death of the sparrow, the occurrence of the inevitable depredations of the hawk. Judgment finds the guilt of the sparrow in the sparrow's innocence. The compulsion to compassion moves the poet. He finds his honesty transcending his prayer, his heart's duty in the ceremony of inscription; finds it his hard music to "grave, / Before the lunge of the night, the notes on this time-shaken / Stone for the sake of the souls of the slain birds sailing." (Compare Skelton's "Philip Sparrow.")

Against this enterprise of the poet, Thomas poses, lets stand, the churchly heron, the calm hungry-but-organized bird, who also stands spectator to the disaster of "slain birds" and, though itself a member of the tribe, is the formal voice, the liturgy in a late whisper, offering its neighbourly complaint, apart.

Thomas speaks for the poet as the cantor, the incantatory scribe. And yet the tone reaches to an incipient self-lament, the struggle is in the single soul. The involvement is whole. The mask presumes the face.

All the poems of *In Country Sleep* reflect the ritual approach. The poet intones. His is the secular inflection. Faith is the central faith in the sensual fact. His rose is a sexual red. His religion is the Mary-breasted grief-taught love.

Thomas savors his tongue. It is a prime organ with him. Anyone who has heard him read (and who hasn't? and who hasn't, should) remembers the strong syllabic drunkenness (something of an orgy), the craze of sound sometimes running against the flow and the clear sense (something Swinburnian). "Over Sir John's Hill," typically Thomas, is thoroughly rhymed and thoroughly assonanced and thoroughly reined and pranced. The swash of the lines buckles nicely at the joints.

Having had a chance to study the drafts of a poem by Thomas, I know that his seeming spontaneity is a studied grace. Rhetoric is his controlling artifice; so-called traditional form is not much involved, however invoked. He will rehearse and rehearse a poem to dredge every pun and alliterative emendation. His drafts are many and also the metamorphoses. They testify to a keen critical self-scrutiny and an ear that will not work without the mind.

A poem like "Over Sir John's Hill," a richly representative piece, very near to an epitaph, proves the capabilities of Thomas's distinctly elemental language. Latin-syllables, the drawn-to-conclusion words, are rare. This precise aversion, or avoidance, is a virtue (to an unexampled and unexpected degree) in his work: it prevents poems of a strong opening cloudiness from being completely overcast and closed. The words are immediate words, the "spray," as Dr. Williams might say, of our life, and they enter, even if not with utter distinctness, with friendliness and frankness and distinction into the listening consciousness. "Twenty-four years remind the tears of my eyes. / (Bury the dead for fear that they walk to the grave in labour.); "You have kicked from a dark den, leaped up the whinnying light, / And dug your grave in my breast." As rhetorical as such language may become, as tortured for sense, as cramped for the sake of keeping to form, the very choice of the words, whatever their usage, and the clear-cut heavy rhythms bring a familiarity.

In a poem like "Over Sir John's Hill" the variety of line-lengths and the shifting of action and the drama inherent tend to intensify and modulate the motion. Thomas reaches his pitch. In contrast, we have to suffer the hemmed and, unfortunately, also hawed structure of "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good

Night," where the set form of the villanelle treads Thomas' feet. The poem endures as simple iteration; it should be compared with (apart from late Yeats) a recent poem of Wallace Stevens, "Madame La Fleurie," where similar sentiment is more maturely and excellently probed, gaining too by its lack of prefabrication. And Stevens, remember, is the other renowned rhetorician of our day.

Thomas has found his themes at Delphi. He has the choice of going back or going forward and in either case the choice is a necessary illusion, an act desperately trying to be relevant. After the establishment of his reversible (though irreversible) contingency of birth and death, everything he writes is conditioned by it. The sexual act and its aspects reiterate his condition and, generalizing, man's. He rails against the mechanical act, acceptance, resignation, though he has fixed his doom. He reveres the individual soaked in sense. And yet perhaps because he is devoted to the ceremonial, his craft, at the same time he yearns for the convictions of life: ". . . for the lovers, their arms / Round the griefs of the ages, / Who pay no praise of wages / Nor heed my craft or art." "Break in the sun till the sun breaks down, / And death shall have no dominion." "The sun roars at the prayer's end."

For all the beauties I have outlined in Thomas's poetry — and they persist through criticism — his verse likes to mimic itself. I suspect that the unusual "success" he has enjoyed (or possibly not enjoyed) has prodded him to repeat his past performances excessively. He often rides his rhetorical genius too hard and it pants too obviously (as in "Poem on His Birthday": the celebration is a hog). There is a reluctance to win new ground. Poems like "Fern Hill" or "Poem in October" or "In My Craft or Sullen Art" (some of his most popular pieces) rely on rhetorical devices that sometimes run shallow and use sentimentality to the point where the reader questions sincerity. There is, in these tricks, a sense of self-idolatry that no amount of whimsy or good humor can wholly contradict. The rhythms are heavy and prompt repetitiousness. And even a poem as good as "Over Sir John's Hill" overplays itself in onomatopoetic effects: "until / The flash the noosed hawk / Crashes, and slowly the fishing holy stalking heron / In the river Towy below bows his tilted headstone." Exegesis helps this poem by slowing it up in the reading, halts the gabble. Thomas can hypnotize the listener, but there is a loss; Thomas intends more than intonation and the high-pressured phrasing must yield, if the poem is to move with a deep effect.

His peril is the peril of a fixed rhetorical styling that has become such a good seller in the marketplace that it is hard to grow up out of, and into a new event. He has become an established personality, a fixture. He is pinched in by self-definition that occurred at an early age and seems to have considerably limited his potential.

An added taint is the fact that his imitators, who are legion today, have picked up, like most such, all his tricks and so emphasize his weaknesses. His work has little to teach. It is a dead end. Like Eliot. As far as craft goes. He is himself a careful craftsman; he knows the limits of his rhetoric, I believe, though he will indulge it at times. But consider his imitators. You might, for instance, look at the Summer 1952 number of the *Beloit Poetry Journal*. A poem by a young poet opens:

From heaven my rainy father reigned
 more Gabriel than the dawn,
 walking how heavy in his top-dollar town
 to wear the sun like a derby.

and continues in like fashion. You see the bait swallowed. The slackness it produces, the mask of voice, the mimicry of rhythms without coherence, and the clever combinations. In the same issue, by another new poet, is this opening:

██████████

Unanimously from his cowl of flesh as countries riven,
 in tattered grace my frame's five senses break
 quickening, wrought buds at civilization's wake.

██████████

It is actually possible, if it were worth the effort, to demonstrate almost phrase for phrase, rhythm for rhythm, trick for trick, the influence of Thomas on this poem.

These influencings undoubtedly detract from Thomas's quality. His verve, his crying spirit, his naughtiness, his rhetorical romancing, are wide attractions. It is worth more of our careful consideration as to how deep and insightful are his poems and how superficial and rhetorically blinding, as well as captivating.

BERNARD LANDIS:

The Philosophical Fiction of Hermann Hesse

HERMANN HESSE: *Siddhartha*. (Translated by Hilda Rosner.)
 New Directions.

New Directions' addition of *Siddhartha* to its New Classics series should contribute to an awakening of American readers' interest in Hermann Hesse. For this slim novel, written in 1923 after the author had returned from a year in India, presents clearly all the essential elements of his philosophy, otherwise to be gleaned from dozens of volumes of fiction and poetry (mostly untranslated, although three other novels, *Demian*, *Steppenwolf*, and *Death and the Lover*, have long been available in America, and *Magister Ludi* — the novel for which he was awarded the Nobel prize — appeared in translation in 1949).

Although his writings have so far been too subjective and bizarre for even limited acceptance in the United States, Hesse's novels have a central philosophical theme and a quest that strongly influenced two generations of post-war European youth. The theme is the duality of man, racked with the conflict engendered by desire for sensual experience, counterbalanced by admonitions of the intellect and the striving for spiritual self-realization. The quest is the resolution of that dichotomy through a unification of sex and suffering, music and mysticism, art and death.

The duality of Hesse, clearly depicted in the mother-father worlds of *Siddhartha*, has a metaphysical basis that is best illustrated in his first major novel, *Demian*, where the central question is: what is man? He believes that men are all born of a common womb, yet strive to express their own individualities. This

thought parallels that expressed by Carlo Levi in *Of Fear And Freedom*: in the beginning all was mass, and mass comprised all. Out of this indifferent substance, Hesse saw humanity surge forth to determine itself. With the severance of man's umbilical cord with nature, there arises an uncontrolled terror of unknowingness. Impelled to hasten back to prebirth serenity, an impossibility, man is impaled on the cross whose vertical element is dread of a doubtful liberty and whose horizontal component is dread of a deathful passiveness. In Hesse's works, this anguish is developed and transposed to the perpendicular tides of doubt concerning the values of man's animal self on the one hand, and fear of spiritual sterility on the other.

This philosophic concept of dualism, however, had its origins in actual experience. In 1915, during the war years, Hesse publicly stated his regret that the German intellectuals found nothing better to do than spread lies and hatred. For this he was denounced as a traitor and hurled in conflict with a world in which he had previously been a peaceful and productive participant. An abyss stretched between tragic reality and what had always seemed to him desirable and worthy. But, as he was unable to hold society at fault, his enigma became internalized. "There must therefore have been some disorder within myself that had brought me into conflict with the world."

The sense of being at variance with a hostile world was not uncommon to that post-war generation. Thus, when Hesse published *Demian* in 1919, the book met with instant success among those many individuals who were seeking for some certainty to relieve and resolve the tensions and contradictions of life.

Sinclair, the youthful protagonist, (and precursor of the young Indian, Siddhartha,) was torn between the security of home, church, and mores and the outside realm of sin, sex and excitement. Above his door stood an old crest of a large bird set for flight. To Sinclair, the door (inwardness) and its sign (outwardness) represented the ultimate conflict projected by his concept of two worlds, one introspective and moral, the other external and amoral. Through the analytical aid of Demian, a mature school friend, Sinclair found the chaotic path that led to an understanding of his self. For Demian familiarized him with the deity Abraxas, that ancient and mystical Greek name signifying salvation through a unity of the divine and the diabolical. Sinclair understood that life was neither moral nor immoral, good nor evil, but a complex of all phases of existence.

Siddhartha continues the search for self-realization that was begun in *Demian*. The first lines of the book disclose the familiar father-mother worlds that exist to some degree in each of Hesse's novels: the dominating, intellectual spirit of the former and the pulsating, emotional heart of the latter. These concepts, especially of the earth-mother as source and protectress, govern each sphere of life. Elsewhere Hesse has written: "I cannot rid myself of the idea that instead of Death with his scythe, it will be my mother who takes me to herself once more and leads me back into non-existence and innocence."

Siddhartha, the strong and handsome son, was made of both his parents; from his father the Brahmin he learned the art of contemplation, and through his mother he understood the quiet dreams and emotions symbolized by their garden. Nevertheless, he was restless. For all his knowledge, he was unhappy. A vital element was missing in his personal ontology.

To find that elixir which would bind his disorganized parts, Siddhartha

began a determined pursuit of self-discovery. No parental pleas could hold him back. Just as Sinclair learned in *Demian* that "it was entirely wrong to wish to give the world anything. A man has absolutely no other duty than this: to seek himself, to grope his own way forward, no matter whither it leads," so it was with Siddhartha.

He left his home and joined a group of ascetics whose one goal was peace, the peace that was gained through loss of consciousness of the self. To this end he fasted, blistered his flesh, cut it on thorns, sustaining every conceivable physical and mental torture. "A dead jackal lay on the sandy shore and Siddhartha's soul slipped into its corpse; he became a dead jackal, lay on the shore, swelled, stank, decayed, was dismembered by hyenas, was picked at by vultures, became a skeleton, became dust, mingled with the atmosphere." While this life did not provide the solution to Siddhartha's dilemma, it was an integral part of his development. Actually the theme, or cult, of suffering is common to Hesse's entire body of writing. This is not surprising since Hesse, a veritable genius of suffering, was profoundly influenced by Novalis, who had written: "A man should be proud of suffering. All suffering is a reminder of our high estate."

The years of punishment sharpened Siddhartha's perception but in no way brought him any closer to the final *truth* he sought. He left the ascetics and the holy men and continued his quest for personal resolution in the world of daily affairs. There he deftly learned all the tricks of trade, the games of gambling, and mastered the art of love. The greater his success in achieving material gain, the further away from his goal he traveled. He was surfeited with worldly pleasure, but his senses decayed and happiness eluded him.

At last, the sterility of this life weighed heavily upon him and he abandoned his possessions to re-enter the forests with nothing but loin cloth and walking stick. Aged and worn, he assumed the life of a ferryman. He traversed the currents of the river day and night, when finally he was cognizant of contentment. For the river gave up its secrets to him. He perceived it to be the mirror of all life, past, present and future. All was One, and One was All. Spirit and flesh, mountain and man, blood and stone were all a part of the one continuous flow of existence. True peace was obtained in the only way possible, through a unity of the self with the universal, eternal essence, through a mystic identification with Sansara and Nirvana.

Siddhartha contains all of the fundamentals of Hesse's philosophy: the division of the universe into masculine and feminine worlds, the cult of suffering, anathema of dogma, antipathy to group action, the concept of the garden-forest as a source of security, and the everlasting conflict of new against old, birth against death, in the recurring life cycle.

It is interesting to follow these themes as they were woven into a third major novel, *Steppenwolf*, four years later in 1927. In the guise of Harry Haller, Hesse led his readers into the alien and incongruous world of the lonely, middle-aged intellectual with nothing ahead of him, and little behind. Harry drifted, dried out from trying to live the Apollonian ideal of a formal ordering of life while yearning for the aesthetic embrace of experience, its Dionysian opposite. Harry had never learned to be happy. "The cause of this apparently was that at the bottom of his heart he knew all the time that he was in reality not a man, but a wolf of the Steppes . . . and so the Steppenwolf had two

natures, a human one and a wolfish one . . . the one existed simply and solely to harm the other."

This is another aspect of Hesse's dualistic approach, but its roots go deep into German romantic literature. Compare the above quotation to the words of Faust, a hundred years earlier. "Two souls, alas, are housed within my breast, / And each will wrestle for the mastery there. / The one has passion's craving crude for love, / And hugs a world where sweet the senses rage; / The other longs for pastures fair above, / Leaving the murk for lofty heritage."

In following the introspective quest of a divided individual, Hesse continued in a romantic tradition, but for Harry Haller the quest was more than a matter of soul searching. Life, as he saw it, was an optical illusion. Its many phases of activity coming from one body presented a false impression of unity, but in actuality it was the combined reflection of a thousand different, struggling images in the dark mirror of the spirit. An epiphany of salvation comes as Harry is instructed into the art of life: the building of the soul by skillful, chesslike developments of its separate components into a unified, mystical entity, a process that parallels Siddhartha's understanding of the river as a blending of the All into One. (We find a similar thought voiced by Eliot: "You dozed, and watched the night revealing / The thousand sordid images / Of which your soul was constituted.")

Another version-with-variations of the same basic theme(s) was incorporated into the novel *Magister Ludi*, for which Hesse won the Nobel prize in 1946. Instead of continuing this exploration of Hesse's thought, however, it is in order to comment on his craftsmanship. This is not easy. Hesse's earliest and constant ambition has been the creation of poetry; and translation of "poetic prose" — especially when it is bucolic, lovely, and wistful — at its best serves to convey only literal meaning.

Keeping this qualification in mind, one gets the impression from the translation that his narratives seldom flow of their own accord. The construction is often artificial polemics, contrived to push the message through. *Siddhartha*, perhaps because of its brevity, is a notable exception; *Steppenwolf* has sustained passages of rare and beautiful, fantastic and imaginative surrealistic imagery which more than compensate for the stiff narration. But, anxious to communicate, Hesse overbears on such words as "despair," "death," "sad music," "two worlds," and "suicide." At times it seems that he was unable to convey mood through art, and so resorted to labeling to achieve effect. Rarely is the reader fully able to accept the weird, supernatural situations that Hesse creates. (The Magic Theatre for Madmen in *Steppenwolf* and the intellectual community of Castalia in *Magister Ludi* are two of the few instances where this does not hold true.) They do not hold together, even when one accepts the fundamental premise. Where Kafka succeeds, Hesse falters — at least in translation.

Style, form, and content unite to underlie his thesis of supra-individualism. Hesse believes that the difficulties besetting mankind have their sources within the individual and are not involved in a social context. This apparently anti-social attitude may have roots in a heritage of German introspection. Harry Slochower has pointed out, in this respect, that "Germany has had no realistic and critical traditions such as France had in Montaigne, Molière, Diderot, Voltaire, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Barbusse; as England had in the movement

from Defoe to Dickens and Shaw; or as Russia had from Gogol to Gorky. Instead it has veered towards the mythical, the musical, the mystical."

These last adjectives also apply to the solution that Hesse suggests as a remedy for the illnesses of society. Each man must traverse the hell of his inner self, his subconscious and unconscious, turning the self inside out to clean the wounds inflicted in the battles between flesh and spirit, and fuse the two. This undertaking of suffering may lead to death; yet to Hesse it is the only way to truth and salvation. For out of the ashes like the phoenix, reincarnated man can return — an avatar of love.

CHARLES SHATTUCK:

The Bentley Project

From the Modern Repertoire, edited by Eric Bentley. Series I (1949); Series II (1952). University of Denver Press.

Mr. Bentley is doing splendid service to the American theatre, what there is of it, by his specialized anthologies. He has presented twenty plays in the two volumes now published, and promises another ten in volume III and an anthology of modern dramatic theory (Zola to Brecht) in volume IV. One can buy these books without fear of having already bought most of their contents under other covers. Plays of the major moderns (Ibsen, Shaw, Chekhov, etc.) are excluded on the grounds that the best of them are available inexpensively elsewhere. Other standard masterpieces (*The Weavers*, *The Lower Depths*, *Cyrano*, and the like) are excluded because they are already to be found in *A Treasury of the Theatre* and a dozen other collections. It is not Mr. Bentley's purpose to define the corpus of modern drama, which would involve repeating what everyone else has done, but to enlarge it, by bringing forward plays which have been wrongly neglected or misunderstood or hitherto unknown.

It is particularly gratifying to welcome back from the limbo of "Out of Print" those plays so essential to the modern theatre as Lorca's *Don Perlimplin*, Cocteau's *The Infernal Machine*, and Cummings' *him* — these we cannot be without; and to welcome the first printing of Francis Fergusson's *The King and the Duke* (a mock-minstrel-show, out of *Huckleberry Finn*), and the first printing in English of Giraudoux's *Electra*, Obey's *Venus and Adonis*, and especially Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* and *Galileo*. All these plays and many more cry out for doing, as well as reading, and they can be purchased at no other stand.

Since fifteen of the twenty plays are translations (many being new ones), and the editor is hostile to the "freely adapted-from" formula, it must be expected that a few of them will march with respect to the English but on one leg badly, and the reading is not always fair. Translation is a dangerous art. Some things translate and some don't; some translators find the golden idiom and some only brass; some have no vocabulary but Cassell's and no familiar talk but half-remembered phrases from years ago or from the reading of books; and there is the matter of dialect: these are the eternal problems of transferring

plays from one language and culture to another. Every producer of Lorca in English has learned that he must occasionally shake down the rigidities of O'Connell and Graham into something speakable, and every American producer of *The Infernal Machine* has had to revise Wildman's perfectly proper British soldier slang into its American equivalent, lest Cocteau sound like a precious fool. So the producer of most of these translations ought to work freely with the originals and with his actors to improve the texts as they are being learned. The translations by Stephen Spender (Büchner's *Danton's Death*), Desmond Vesey (*Threepenny Opera*), and Jacques Barzun (Becque's *La Parisienne* and Mirbeau's *The Epidemic*) are excellent, and Charles Laughton's job on *Galileo* is so good that one would think he wrote the play himself — which, according to the notes, is approximately what happened.

Merely to get these plays in print has been no mean accomplishment. It was the common gossip of the book peddlers three years ago when the first volume appeared that "no commercial publisher would touch it." For though the trade in play-books and theatre stuff in general is very lively these days, and the various Gassner-edited *Twenty Bests* are replacing the necktie as a national birthday present, still it seems no one wants to tie up money in books that sell slowly because of being off the beaten track. Hence, though one would like to quarrel with the University of Denver Press over the unattractive format of these volumes, one had better be grateful to them instead for their careful job of editing and for getting the job done in any format at all.

Books like these will sell slowly, but they will sell steadily and for a long time to come, because the American theatre, what there is of it, must keep turning to such plays as well as to the classics and "modern masterpieces" for sustenance. The university theatre at Illinois, where I sometimes direct, has produced more than a fourth of the plays here anthologized, and is the healthier for having done so, and I suppose will produce more of them hereafter. The theatres at Vassar and Bennington have premiered at least two of the plays, and produced many others. There are, indeed, school theatres all over the country (to say nothing of the amorphous many-headed surge toward theatre in and around New York, called Off-Broadway) where the first business is not Show Business, but a steady concern for theatre as an art form. In such places, at least, and in libraries of thoughtful readers, these anthologies will find perennial usefulness.

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KERKER QUINN (Editor)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 15th day of October, 1952.

KATHERINE H. PEER, Notary Public

(My commission expires November 19, 1953)